VOL. 131 No. 13 • THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2025 North Texas Daily @NTDaily @NTDaily NTDAILY.COM

North Texas Daily

Serving the University of North Texas & Denton since 1916

Arts & Life

Musicians perform original songs in Denton's 22nd annual Rock Lottery

Members of the newly formed band Bog Babies perform during Rock Lottery 22 at Dan's Silverleaf on Nov. 15, 2025. **Photo by Sophia Carbajal**

By Sophia Carbajal
Senior Arts & Life Writer

On Saturday evening, five bands who had never practiced together before that day performed in front of a sold-out crowd at Dan's Silverleaf for the 22nd annual Rock Lottery on Nov. 15.

Rock Lottery is an event where 25 local musicians across all different styles, genres and backgrounds are paired into random groups of five, and are then given 12 hours to write and perform three to five songs. Chelsey Danielle, a local musician and host of Rock Lottery 22, said the concert offers musicians a chance to collaborate in unpredictable ways.

"What I love about it is that we are a community that is experiencing art in the moment," Danielle said. "This will never happen again. These bands will never perform again."

The musicians met earlier in the day at 10 a.m. for their band assignments before being sent off to their rehearsal location. Each of the five groups created band names: Bog Babies, The Chrome Ponies, Release the Smiles, Dr. Jesus and Chunk.

The first band to form was Bog Babies, whose lead singer was 33-year-old Robyn Harris, a Denton-based solo musician. After the group decided on the band name, one member suggested they make all of their songs based on the title character from "Shrek" (2001) because a bog reminded them of the swamp where Shrek lives.

Harris said it was a challenge for her and the band's drummer, Sinclaire Wade — who is used to the genres of pop and R&B — to mesh their styles with the other three band members. However, after deciding to stage a Shrek-themed performance, Harris said the band developed a narrow focus that made the songwriting process easier.

ROCK continues on page 4

Sports

Head coach John Hedlund celebrates after his 400th victory as head coach against Temple at the Soccer and Track & Field Stadium on Sept. 26, 2024. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

Hedlund announces plans to retire after 2026 season

By Haylie Stum
Senior Sports Writer

Head coach John Hedlund only played the University of Pittsburgh once in his 31 years at the helm of the North Texas women's soccer team.

The Mean Green's sole date with the Panthers came on Sept. 2, 2018, when North Texas bested Pittsburgh 4-1 in Denton. In Hedlund's eyes, that year's team was his most talented roster on paper, one that went to double overtime with Texas A&M University in the NCAA Tournament.

Randy Waldrum, the first coach in NCAA history to lead a team to a national title in his or her first season with a program, was tasked with turning around Pittsburgh that season. Losing to Hedlund's squad in his sixth game with the Panthers, he remembers exactly how ruthless the Mean Green played his team around the goal.

"Those four goals could have been eight goals on the day, [and] they just outplayed us in every aspect on the pitch," said Waldrum, a previous two-time national coach of the year recipient. "It was one of those things that you're looking at and you're trying to tell your kids at that time, 'That's a good team. That's the standard. That's the level we need to aspire to get to.'"

Thanks to Hedlund, the North Texas women's soccer program has become a benchmark of success felt across the university and collegiate soccer landscape. The walls of the team's facility boast 16 large plaques of every conference championship, a display supported by 30 consecutive winning seasons and seven NCAA Tournament appearances.

Setting a standard goes deeper than titles and trophies, as the head coach's impact continues to ripple through the community.

"I started the program, I built the program and I couldn't see myself wearing different colors," Hedlund said. "I just wanted to build something really special, and that was important to me. When people think of UNT soccer, they think of John Hedlund."

Before wearing the whistle

Before Hedlund became the winningest coach in North Texas history across all sports, he was a young Californian who was handed a soccer ball by his father. He stuck with the sport above all others, ultimately electing to pursue soccer only.

Hedlund and his family eventually moved to Plano, where he joined the Sparta Soccer Club, one of the top youth clubs in Texas. G Guerrieri, the recently retired women's soccer head coach at Texas A&M, was a goalkeeper on the team at the time. He witnessed early flashes not only of Hedlund's talent but also of his competitive nature.

"He would routinely score and make me look silly in training," Guerrieri said. "He was one of those guys that, if they weren't winning, he was like, 'All right, just give me the ball.'"

HEDLUND continues on page 6

News

'I am honored to have served': Denton County veterans reflect on time of service

By Lauren Pruett
Staff Writer

Editor's note: This story includes discussion of suicide and descriptions of war.

Veterans and their families, public officials and citizens of Denton County gathered at Denton's Downtown Square to celebrate and honor Veterans Day.

Among the attendees were 69-year-old Ken Horn, Sgt. Monty Slough and Senior Chief Petty Officer Mike Romanofski, who utilized the celebration to reflect on their time of service. Each of them dedicated years of their life to the United States Marine Corps, United States Navy and U.S. Army, with a combined 35 years of military service between them.

"The Marines definitely made me from a child into an adult with responsibilities you've never dreamed of," Horn said.

The event, held Nov. 11, celebrated the more than 41,000 veterans who have settled down in Denton County. Horn, Slough and Romanofski are three of them.

Horn served five years in the Marines as a machine gunner during the Vietnam War, and was stationed in Japan and Cambodia. Two weeks into his senior year of high school, Horn said he was not learning anything and decided to enlist.

"I tried to go to the Air Force, but they wouldn't take me because I didn't graduate," Horn said. "Three days later, the Marine Corps recruiter asked me if I was still interested in the service. I said yes, and he told me to come in. Three days [after that], I was up to Camp Pendleton in San Diego."

Slough, 74, who served in the Army for four years, was a mine dog handler in Vietnam, and also left high school to enlist in the military. Slough said he enlisted at 17 in an attempt to make life easier for his mother.

"I was in high school and I thought, 'If I go into the military, my mom won't have to worry about trying to take

ROTC cadets carry a memorial wreath during the Veterans Day event on the Denton County Courthouse lawn at Denton's Downtown Square on Nov. 11, 2025. **Photo by Dilip Devanda**

care of me,'" Slough said. "I grew up in the Army, from age 17 to 19."

Romanofski, 57, served 26 years in the U.S. Navy as an aviation electrician's mate. Romanofski said he joined because he wanted money for college, but also wanted to see the world.

"I wanted to see something different," Romanofski said. "In the Navy, I was literally able to sail around the world. I've been around the world on the water."

Horn, Slough and Romanofski said they did not regret their military service.

Slough spent his first three years in the Army stationed in Germany. He said he decided he wanted to make a career in the military, but when he was sent to Vietnam, his unit was ambushed and he was severely wounded.

VETERANS continues on page 3

What's Inside:

News pg.2
University changes policy regarding electric micromobility vehicles

The Dose pg.5
'Now You See Me: Now You Don't' adds very little to the decade-long franchise

Opinion pg.8
Lack of adequate K-12 literacy rates exposes failure of modern American school systems

North Texas Daily

Editorial Team

Editor-in-Chief
Gianna Ortner-Findlay
@giannae.ortner_reports

Managing Editor
Hannah Everett
@hannah.g.everett

Design Editor
Mekielle Vaughn
@notso_meek

Digital Editor
Aiden Gonzalez
@_xiden

News Editor
Shehzil Imran
@Shehzildoesjournalism

Arts & Life/The Dose Editor
Matthew Winter
@matthewwinter_journalism

Opinion Editor
Alejandra Osegueda

Video Editor
Cooper Collins
@cooper_videos

Photo Editor
Ismael Beltran
@izzyf1icks

Illustrations Editor
Victoria Maldonado
@esmerelda.vic

Sports Editor
Justin Na

Production Team

Page Designer
Janese Mashell
@janloumas

Copyeditor
Baylee Cantrell
@bayleeisonline

Copyeditor
Samantha Heath
@samdoesjournalism

Faculty Advisor
Randy Loftis
940-565-3495//Randy.Loftis@unt.edu

Scan to sign up for our weekly newsletter, *The Daily Digest*

University shifts electric micromobility vehicle policy

By Joseph Neuenschwander
Staff Writer

The university will restrict where students can charge electric scooters, skateboards and bike vehicles in January 2026 due to safety concerns about the lithium-ion batteries that power them.

According to a UNT Transportation Services Instagram post, the change to the electric micromobility vehicle policy was implemented because lithium-ion batteries can overheat if improperly charged or damaged, posing a fire hazard.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, a micromobility vehicle is "any small, low-speed, electric-powered transportation device," which can range from electric bikes to other lightweight devices like electric scooters and skateboards.

Scott Dunkle, the university's executive director of risk management and certified hazardous materials manager, said fires from lithium-ion batteries are more difficult to put out than regular fires.

"It's not like a regular fire," Scott Dunkle said. "It's difficult for the fire department to put them out because water doesn't work sometimes. You have to use other means or sometimes just let them burn out."

While there have not been any fires related to electric MMVs on the university campus, there have been national incidents, such as when an electric skateboard caught fire in a Purdue University building in 2024.

"Our fire department has been really supportive of us trying to do this," Dunkle said.

Junior biology major Carson Adams said she hates the policy changes because she cannot charge her scooter anywhere on campus.

"I don't understand how you can make a policy if you don't have these backup options," Adams said. "Especially if you're a full-time student who is on campus. It doesn't really make sense."

Ed Reynolds, UNT Police Department's chief of staff, said he does not think policies like this are a big shock to most people.

"We are just trying to put some sensible guidelines in place so that we don't end up like Purdue, where one of the buildings catches on fire," Reynolds said.

One of the bigger risks with electric scooters, Dunkle said, is that some models are not UL-certified. A UL-rated scooter is an electric scooter that has been tested and certified by Underwriters Laboratories which is an independent organization that tests electric scooters for safety. UL tests scooters on battery safety, overcharge protection, short-circuit prevention, heat resistance and overall electrical safety.

"You can have hundreds of MMVs in any given building, given how many students have them," Dunkle said. "With that risk, we really felt like it was important for us to do something."

While some universities, such as Yale, have banned electric MMVs due to the risks associated with their lithium-ion batteries, some MMVs can also reach up to 25 mph. Instead of banning all MMVs, the university has decided to educate students on how to drive and park them safely.

"We're going to do a big push with messaging to our students, faculty and staff on how to properly use a scooter," said Reynolds. "Not only just 'Hey, don't clamp it to an accessible ramp where someone can't use it,' but also just safety tips."

The university's transportation services social media has uploaded educational safety posts since the announcement, in an effort to educate students about the risks associated with lithium-ion batteries.

However, the university also plans to educate students on traffic laws for their electric MMVs.

"There will be an enforcement piece, but we're really going to push the education piece," Reynolds said. "We're trying to make sure everyone understands how to responsibly park the vehicle and to responsibly ride the vehicle."

The enforcement piece of the university's policy on people driving electric MMVs, Reynolds said, would involve issuing citations to students who break traffic laws, such as running a stop sign. Additionally, police can also stop students who are exceeding the speed limit of 20mph on roads and sidewalks while driving electric MMVs.

"Most things you don't necessarily enforce your way out of," Reynolds said. "You get more compliance if you do the education piece, and the enforcement piece is kind of like that next tier for those folks that don't listen."

Since students will be restricted on where they can charge MMVs on campus, Dunkle said he encourages students to charge their vehicles at home before coming to campus.

"We don't want to make it sound like [having charging stations] is going to be a big push," Dunkle said. "We do know that the Union has said they're going to have some charging spaces, but that is the only place for sure."

Editor's note: This article has been shortened for print. Read more at ntdaily.com.

Photo by Caitlin Goodsell

Federal appeals court allows Texas to enforce drag ban following new ruling

By Kyson Barber
Staff Writer

A federal appeals court reversed a previous ruling on Nov. 6, now allowing Texas to officially enforce a ban on "sexually oriented performances," focusing on drag shows.

In 2023, Senate Bill 12 was passed into law as a ban on sexually oriented drag performances on commercial and public property or in the presence of someone 18 years or younger. The ban was ruled unconstitutional by a district judge in September 2023 for First Amendment violations.

"So I think a lot hangs on this constitutional challenge to SB 12 as to how additional anti-LGBTQ legislation might be thought of," said Wesley Phelps, a professor of LGBTQ+ history and author of "Before Lawrence v. Texas: The Making of a Queer Social Movement" (2023).

After the previous ruling of the ban was declared unconstitutional by United States District Judge David Hittner, the Texas Attorney General's office appealed the ruling.

The office filed an appeal with the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals to reverse the ruling and allow the drag ban to continue.

This decision was then sent back to the district for reconsideration by the 5th Circuit because the plaintiffs — the drag performers, venues or companies — did not meet the requirements to be deemed sexually oriented or explicit. Many of the plaintiffs were removed from the case before it was sent back.

The court did not rule on the constitutionality of the ban, but did end the injunction, which allows Texas to enforce the ban.

The ban means that if a drag performer or performance is found to be sexually oriented, then a $10,000 fine can be levied against the business owners hosting the performance, as well as a Class A misdemeanor.

"Based on evidence and testimony presented at the hearing, the court finds there is substantial likelihood that SB 12, as drafted, violated the First Amendment [...] under one or more of the legal theories put forward by the plaintiffs," Hittner said in his initial blockage of the ban.

The three-person judges panel had a majority ruling to allow the ban of sexually-oriented performances to take place. Of the three judges, two concurred with and upheld the ban and the third partially concurred and partially dissented.

The panel found the majority of the plaintiffs involved in the case, such as the Abilene Pride Alliance, Woodlands Pride and individual drag performer Brigitte Bandit, did not host performances that fell under the ban.

The only plaintiff found to be under the scope of the drag ban was 360 Queen Entertainment LLC.

"The opinion offers a strained and wooden account of injury and traceability that ignores the statute's text and the practical realities of its enforcement," 5th Circuit Judge James Dennis, who partially dissented from the majority ruling, said in the ruling.

There are many proponents of the ban in government positions, such as Attorney General Ken Paxton, who said the appeal ruling was a success.

"I will always work to shield our children from exposure to erotic and inappropriate sexually oriented performances," Paxton said in a press release.

Paxton, his legal team and other advocates have said that the legislation aims to protect minors from explicit material and conduct. However, Phelps said the bill feels like an attempt to reduce the visibility of LGBTQ+ people.

A federal appeals court reversed a previous ruling, allowing Texas to officially enforce a ban on drag shows featuring "sexually oriented performances," on Nov. 6, 2025. Allen Vesta Gator performed to protest the university's pause on drag performances on April 23, 2025. **Photo by Gianna Ortner-Findlay**

"State legislators have tried to chip away at some of these measures for equality that have been passed," Phelps said. "Drag bans are the most recent effort to limit the visibility of queer people."

Advocacy groups, such as the Mahogany Project and the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, denounced the ruling as a violation of drag performers' First Amendment rights. In a press release, the ACLU said it will continue to fight the bill.

Despite the current ruling, judges are remanding this bill back to the court. One of the main reasons for this, according to Dennis, is the unclear language that does not contain enough definitions. The ban's reversal and appeal, however, did not rule whether or not the bill is against First Amendment rights.

"People will just remove the art of drag from their programming, from their fundraisers, from their community events or their corporate events," said Verniss McFarland, executive director of the Mahogany Project and drag advocate. "Drag queens are some of the first people that we turn to help raise money or to galvanize clubs and other spaces for visibility."

The 5th Circuit judges' panel has instructed the lower district court to reconsider the case, with most of the plaintiffs removed, and decide on language that is more concrete and enforceable by Paxton.

"This rhetoric and legislation is already causing harm because of the culturally reactionary narratives they create," said Sissa Muerta, a BBC Dallas-Fort Worth drag performer and LGBTQ+ advocate. "[The legislation] ultimately leads to more personal and structural violence being enacted upon us."

Veterans Day celebration honors Denton County's more than 41,000 veterans and their collective decades of service

VETERANS continued from page 1

"Dog handlers walked in front of the infantry," Slough said. "I was asked to lead a seven-man unit when we were ambushed. Only three of us survived."

Slough faced multiple injuries from the ambush, including being shot and taking a hit in the neck, head, shoulder and the side of his body. In addition, Slough said he took a hit in his right leg and broke it.

"One of the infantry guys hit a booby trap, and it killed the other guys instantly," Slough said.

After he recovered, Slough said he tried to return to the war.

"I loved the Army, I wanted to make a career in the Army, but I was medically retired," Slough said. "When I got to the hospital in Fort Hood, Texas, they gave me the option to stay in, but as a pencil pusher. I'm not a pencil pusher, I'm an action guy."

Romanofski said he did not regret the time he spent in the Navy, but he missed important family time and events. He and his wife were high school sweethearts and have been together for 40 years, raising two children together.

"It's not really a regret but [it was difficult] not being there for some of the family events because I was deployed, but my sons understood that and they accepted it," Romanofski said. "My time in the Navy made me a stronger person and allowed me to raise a family."

According to RAND, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, veterans face many different issues when they return home, ranging from struggles with access to medical care to finding employment. Horn said he recently experienced the struggles of accessing medical care.

Army veteran Sgt. Monty Slough stands next to an "Honor and Remember" flag during the Veterans Day event on the Denton County Courthouse lawn on Nov. 11, 2025. **Photo by Dilip Devanda**

"Veterans cannot get the proper healthcare in a limited time," Horn said. "It's too long of a wait to get anything done. For six months, I just thought I had laryngitis. [It] wound up to be stage four throat cancer before the doctors decided to get something done."

Horn went through chemotherapy and radiation treatment for his throat cancer, and as of his last scan in March, he is cancer-free.

Slough shared Horn's sentiments about the difficulties of medical care access for veterans, saying all veterans know about the difficulties of getting medical care from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Slough also said he feels civilians do not understand what it can be like for veterans when they return home. Slough said he has had to explain to mothers that just like how people turn into different people from high school to college, veterans also do not come back the same person.

"These guys are coming back, though, these young guys, people don't understand what they're going through," Slough said. "It don't necessarily have to be a war — a war just makes it worse. But the life of the military is way different than civilian."

In addition to feeling misunderstood by civilians, both Horn and Romanofski said they feel frustrated at the lack of appreciation and respect for veterans today.

"More people need to appreciate what the veterans actually have done and are still doing in the community itself for the betterment of the community and their fellow veterans," Horn said.

Another pressing issue that Romanofski said upsets him is the suicide rates among veterans.

According to a 2024 report from the VA, the 2022 veteran suicide rates in Texas were "significantly higher than the national suicide rate." The total number of veteran suicides in 2022 was 582 of the total 4,202 reported suicides in Texas.

"I've had two friends that committed suicide, one of them was when I was in high school, and then the other one was when I was on active duty," Romanofski said. "It's hard to spot and it's hard to deal with for the families."

Despite each veteran facing their own personal struggles, Horn said he did not have any regrets about joining the military — in fact, he wishes he could have stayed in longer.

"[In the military], I learned discipline, respect, honor and the love of my country, not the politicians," Horn said. "I am honored to have served."

If you are in a crisis and actively experiencing an emergency, dial 911. If you are in need of help, the suicide hotline can be reached at 988. For veteran-specific support, press one upon dialing the hotline.

University climbs in social mobility, now ranked 34th nationwide

By Ty Scott
Staff Writer

The university has been ranked 34th in the nation for social mobility, according to the U.S. News & World Report's "Top Performers on Social Mobility."

Katie Hermes, the director of the First-Generation Success Center and Division of Student Affairs staff, said the university's climb from last year's rank of 44th is due to the resources and support available for first-generation students on and off campus.

"We provide one-on-one support, so we provide coaching," Hermes said. "We are not academic advisors or counselors, we are more of a connector [...] and we make connections to campus resources. We help build community with first-gen students."

Social mobility rankings measure colleges' efforts to help economically disadvantaged students overcome challenges in completing their education. Hermes, a first-generation college graduate herself, said the university's on-campus FGSC provides support for first-gen students.

According to Hermes, the university is about 41 to 42 percent first-generation students. Hermes said first-generation students face challenges while trying to build community since they may not reach family off campus easily. To combat this, the first-gen center hosts events, such as late-night study breaks, that offer opportunities to connect with others.

"The first-gen center is open to all students," Hermes said. "Of course, we are first-gen focused, but we are open to everyone. That is really important to us because we do not want to turn anyone away."

Financial hardship can make it difficult for university students to work and pay for necessities such as tuition and rent. To help those facing hardship, the FGSC offers financial counseling and connections to Pell grants, scholarships and internships for economically disadvantaged students.

"We try to keep in mind the financial barriers," FGSC Student Services Coordinator Maddie Lindstrom said. "To a lot of students, not even just first gen."

Lindstrom, who was also a first-generation college student at Texas Tech University, said the FGSC often talks with students about FAFSA, budgeting, on-campus employment and internships.

In addition to financial support, students can meet with academic advisors who can assist them in building and reviewing course schedules, said Lindstrom. These connections can be made wherever a student needs them, from academic advising to financial counseling and support.

First-generation marketing and finance sophomore Meghan Reid said she has used some of the resources for first-generation students, such as the College of Business' First In Business program.

Similar to the FGSC, the First in Business program provides career counseling and connections for students looking for a future in business. Additionally, the Emerald Eagles Scholars program covers tuition and mandatory fees for students with high financial needs. The program is open to all qualifying students at the university.

First Generation Success Center director Katie Hermes (right) talks about the mission and events that the FGSC put on over the academic semester on Nov. 13, 2025. **Photo by Eli Isbill**

"There are lots of programs," Reid said. "First in Business, Emerald Eagles Scholars—I feel like there are lots of programs to help you if you are a first-gen student."

Hermes said the FGSC resources and connections help support all students. The center's initiative to help students is a part of a mindset that, as Hermes put it, sees them as an asset.

"We always try to see our students from an asset-base perspective," Hermes said. "We think being first-generation is something you should be proud of. We think it is a very common identity on campus, and we are privileged to work every day with first-gen students."

Students can visit the FGSC on the third floor of the Union in Suite 376. Hermes said they are happy to connect all students with the resources they need.

"I think the connections we make is one of our most important resources we can provide," Hermes said. "[...] You do not know what you do not know, and that's all students [...] not just first-gen. We really want to be the office that you can talk to about your concerns and make those connections right away."

‘Art in the moment’: Local musicians form temporary bands at Rock Lottery event

ROCK continued from page 1

Newly formed band Release the Smiles perform during Rock Lottery 22 at Dan’s Silverleaf on Nov. 15, 2025. **Photo by Sophia Carbajal**

“That’s kind of like the crux of all of it because we had three very much doom metal-influenced people and two very not in that genre,” Harris said. “Figuring out how to represent each of what we brought to the table, I think that’s just the easiest way we figured it out.”

Harris and the rest of the Bog Babies wanted their performance to be more playful than serious, so they integrated jokes and lyrics from the “Shrek” movies into their set. The Bog Babies opened the show at 9:30 p.m. on Saturday, with their first Shrek-themed song, where the band and the crowd shouted “That’s my swamp” throughout the chorus.

For Harris, performing at Rock Lottery with musicians she did not know was hard but rewarding.

“It was a cool challenge,” Harris said. “It was definitely an opportunity for growth, but also just an opportunity to step out of being like ‘This is serious,’ and have more fun and still make art.”

Some of the musicians participating in Rock Lottery played instruments that do not traditionally fit within the rock genre. One of these musicians, 30-year-old Leah De Leon, played a violin for most of her performance with the band The Chrome Ponies. De Leon dug her bow into the violin strings so hard that most of the strings snapped.

In true rock fashion, De Leon threw her violin down onto the stage at the end of the last song, a cover of “Toxic” (2004) by Brittany Spears. De Leon stomped and jumped on the violin, wood pieces flying and breaking apart before she handed out the leftover pieces to the crowd.

De Leon said participating in Rock Lottery allowed her to befriend musicians she would never have had the chance to meet.

“If you’re a local musician, you know that this is a thing, and if you’re invited to be a part of it, you’re like ‘Dang, I made it,’” De Leon said. “I feel super honored to be invited and to be a part of it, and it was so much fun to meet my fellow musicians in a different context.”

After giving it their all in just one performance, the bands split up at the end of the night. Before hosting Rock Lottery this year, Danielle performed at two previous shows: the 16th and 20th annual events.

Danielle said these performances pushed her to try new things and become a better musician, describing the experience as the “best blind date you’ll ever be on in your life.” She said this challenge was the most important aspect of Rock Lottery and hopes the experience will inspire other musicians.

“We get stuck as artists sometimes in the same day, in the same loop, playing with the same band, and so this is a moment to just take a break from that and go ‘Wow, I never thought I could do that,’” Danielle said.

Things To Do:

Denton Pitch Competition + Entrepreneur Expo

When: Thursday, Nov. 20, at 5 p.m.
Where: Sunago Bell, 101 S Locust Street, 8th Floor
What: Local entrepreneurs and small business owners are invited to the stage at this shark-tank style pitch competition on Thursday to pitch their business to a judges panel and audience for a shot at cash prizes. There will also be a happy hour, networking and the Entrepreneur Expo following the event. Attendance is free.

UNT Dance & Theatre Presents: New Choreographers Concert

When: Friday, Nov. 21, and Saturday, Nov. 22 at 7:30 p.m.
Where: UNT Department of Dance and Theatre, 1179 Union Circle
What: The students of the university’s dance and theatre department present their latest works. This concert showcases a diverse array of new dance pieces, each choreographed and performed by dedicated students. From contemporary to classical styles, each piece reflects the unique artistic vision of emerging student choreographers and dancers. Tickets are $8 for students, $10 for faculty/staff and $15 for general.

Sacred Reset: Breathwork & Sound Bath

When: Sunday, Nov. 23, at 7 p.m.
Where: Green Space Art Collective, 529 Malone St.
What: A 90-minute breathwork, energy healing and sound bath journey designed to calm the nervous system and restore balance. In the class, attendees will release built-up tension through intentional breath and rest deeply into a sound bath that will, according to the website, guide the body back to peace and harmony. Entry is $44.

Students step into fantasy at university renaissance faire

By Caitlyn Ybarra
Staff Writer

Through the smell of apple cider, the thud of axes and medieval figures, the University Program Council offered students a chance to step back in time, away from deadlines.

The organization’s first-ever Ren Faire transformed the Library Mall and Union South Lawn into an event with medieval food, music and entertainment through the Nov. 11 evening.

Sophomore Oakley Mosely, UPC’s special program coordinator, said the sense of escape was exactly the point.

“I feel like part of Ren Faire is it disconnects you a lot with sort of the reality happening behind you,” Mosely said. “It lets you dive into a fantasy that’s just happening and lets you feel like your college is a little medieval village, even if it’s for like three hours.”

The idea began with Mosely’s own long-time love for Renaissance festivals. Once approved, Mosely and the UPC team worked to recreate the elements that make fairs feel magical.

“I make a tradition of going to Scarborough Fair every year, so it was kind of taking the elements of a fair that I liked, like the food, the wacky activities like axe throwing, and having that live music element,” Mosely said.

But Mosely said they also understood that full-scale fairs can get costly, especially for college students. That became a driving force behind hosting one on campus.

“A large chunk of why people don’t go to ren fairs is because it’s expensive,” Mosely said. “They can’t buy the stuff people are selling, they can’t make the things because it’s always a workshop that costs money. They can’t enjoy the experience because they have to pay to watch it.”

At the craft stations, students could craft fairy wands, fae trinkets and makeshift fairy houses without paying a cent. The affordability, paired with the themed environment, encouraged many attendees to get creative with their outfits, Mosely said.

“There’s something about people coming together over a theme that I think really draws people out,” Mosely said.

Senior communications major Mike Lara took the event as an opportunity for immersion, wearing a custom medieval robe and antlers.

“It opens other people up to feel more into the spirit and mood of the fair itself,” Lara said. “If everyone’s just walking around in plain clothes, it’s basically just a glorified ‘come out here, get your free cider,’ but when I see folks like me [...] well, it’s like there are people who do care about this.”

Lara’s outfit drew inspiration from an Irish folktale and medieval symbolism.

“Usually, medieval knights’ banners were either of their houses or depictions of wishes from their people at home,” Lara said. “What I have here is grain, so it’s basically a wish that I return home with food enough to feed people. [...] I love food and I love feeding people, so I figured I’ll have myself a little banner and also the emblem on my chest be synonymous with grain and harvest.”

Another attendee was a Collin College student and Renaissance fair regular who goes by the name Sir Knight Man, who dressed in a full suit of armor.

“The experience is it feels more [real] and it shows people are actually into something that is out of the norm,” Sir Knight Man said. “You don’t ever see a knight walking around. It encourages trying different things, trying suits of armor, anything like that.”

Sir Knight Man has attended several Texas Renaissance fairs, allowing for perfected armor over time that was both practical and appeared realistic.

“Metal will heat up really fast and get the armor extremely hot,” Sir Knight Man said. “So this is polyurethane plastic. It keeps it cool, the weight is less but the mobility is the same.”

Attendees dance to music during the University Program Council renaissance faire at the Library Mall on Nov. 11, 2025. **Photo by Ryan Drabek**

The use of polyurethane came from trial and error with other materials.

“Before I first started, I used to just buy metal armor off Amazon,” Sir Knight Man said. “Amazon is usually kind of a scam. It’s very painful. The edges aren’t rolled, so it really cuts your skin.”

For Mosely, seeing so many students arrive in handmade, thought-out costumes was one of the most fulfilling parts of the event.

“It just makes me happy to see because obviously it wasn’t like, ‘dressing up is encouraged,’” Mosely said. “People just came out and did it. They wanted to add to the energy and vibe in the air, and that’s something I can’t plan for. It’s just something that people bring.”

That creativity, Mosely said, is one of the university’s strengths, and events like the fair give students a place to show it.

“UNT in itself is a very creative campus, and so it’s nice to have themed events that bring that out so people can see it more,” Mosely said.

‘Now You See Me: Now You Don’t’ adds very little to the decade-long franchise

By Carson Kelly
Staff Writer

Illustration by Arturo Martinez

Sometimes a franchise should stay asleep to lie and revel in its former success, “Now You See Me: Now You Don’t,” (2025) is yet another example of a franchise being revived for little reason.

Over a decade ago, actor Jesse Eisenberg found a role that seemed to delight him to no end. He played J. Daniel Atlas, the charismatic frontman of the Robin Hood-esque magician group, the Four Horsemen. Surrounded by Merritt McKinney (Woody Harrelson), Henley Reeves (Isla Fisher) and Jack Wilder (Dave Franco), “Now You See Me” (2013) became a surprise hit at the box office, grossing over $350 million worldwide in sales.

The sequel, “Now You See Me 2” (2016), came out three years later and grossed similar numbers at the box office, with over $330 million worldwide. So, a third film in the franchise was bound to happen. However, the nearly decade-long wait time was a red flag in hindsight.

Two outcomes can occur when it takes a decade to make another film in a franchise. During the long period between movies, either the film’s integral aspects are perfected, or it results in a multitude of ideas being incoherently mashed together. The latter seems to have happened for “Now You See Me: Now You Don’t,” released in theaters on Nov. 14.

The Four Horsemen are back, this time teaming with three young magicians: Bosco (Dominic Sessa), June (Ariana Greenblatt) and Charlie (Justice Smith). Their goal is to take down Veronika Vanderberg (Rosamund Pike) and her South African diamond company that launders money for the criminal underworld.

The film feels like an attempt to reboot the franchise with a spy thriller theme, but it brings nothing new to the table.

Eisenberg, as the charismatic leader, does not work the third time around. His dynamic with the other horsemen saved the first two films. While all of them look like they enjoyed working together once again – Harrelson specifically seeming to be having a blast – Eisenberg’s leadership is uninspired and old by this third installment.

The new additions of Sessa, Greenblatt and Smith all have the charm to lead a franchise. The dynamics of the three together get lost amid so many characters. Sessa stands out in a couple of moments when he really shines as a snarky, lovable jerk.

Pike, with a South African accent, hams it up as the villain. Despite her entertaining attempt as the lead antagonist, she falls into the traps of a cliched character. Her performance is perfect for a film like this, but the writing does her no favors.

Thaddeus Bradley (Morgan Freeman) and Lula May (Lizzy Caplan) return, with the former feeling shoe-horned into the film and Caplan a bright spot, just as she was in the second film.

One of the main problems with the franchise is the films’ magic. Some of the tricks feel unrealistic at best and impossible at worst. There is a real opportunity to showcase actual tricks and sleight of hand, yet the movie squanders it.

In this film, several scenes attempt to be real and interesting, but then revert to movie magic. It also recycles tricks from the previous two films, with the final act most notably being a rehash of the past. A new and interesting grand climax was needed to make the film stand out, but it failed to deliver.

“Now You See Me: Now You Don’t” is somewhat funny but very flawed. It was magical and not dull, but lacked any actual nuance or interesting creative ideas. That comes down to the cast of characters and the performances of actors known for their eccentric humor. The original cast is enjoyable enough, but a scaled-back reboot just focusing on Sessa, Smith and Greenblatt probably would have given this third film in the franchise actual legs to stand on.

Carson’s rating: 2.5/5

Icon of the Week:

Wendy Carlos

Credit **Ebet Roberts**

The *Daily*’s icon of the week is Wendy Carlos, a Grammy award-winning electronic musician. Being the end of Transgender Awareness Week, observed from Nov. 13-18, Carlos is this week’s icon for her outspoken transgender activism.

Born to a working-class family in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, on Nov. 14, 1939, her mother, a pianist, taught her the instrument at a young age. She could play by the time she was 6 years old, and by 10, she wrote her first composition.

Carlos studied physics and music at Brown University in Rhode Island and graduated in 1962. During her time in college, she gave informal lessons on electronic music to make money. In 1965, she graduated from Columbia University in New York with a master’s degree and assisted prolific composer Leonard Bernstein in presenting an evening of electronic music at the Philharmonic Hall.

During her time at Columbia, Carlos met Robert Moog, becoming partners. She gave him extensive advice and technical assistance in the development of what became the first modern synthesizer, the Moog.

Carlos went on to create several studio albums and multiple soundtracks.

FKA Twigs reinvents previous work ‘EUSEXUA’ with ‘EUSEXUA Afterglow’

By Thomas Trevino
Staff Writer

Released on Jan. 24, FKA Twigs’s “EUSEXUA” was an experimental electronic powerhouse that swept dance pop fans off their feet. Just under 10 months later, FKA Twigs returned with “EUSEXUA Afterglow,” released Nov. 14.

The 11-track follow-up arrived with two singles, “Cheap Hotel” and “Predictable Girl,” and was first teased on Aug. 22 on Instagram with the caption, “hurt so good I got an afterglow.” When announcing the album on Instagram, she called it “a visceral waterfall [...] hungry, raw and ready to be adored,” positioning it as the sensual, pulsing aftermath of the world she built before.

In an Instagram post, FKA Twigs described the term ‘eusexua’ as a practice, a state of being and the pinnacle of human experience. Earlier in the post, she described the album’s origin as “chicken scratch [...] written on the back of my hand in a toilet at a rave in Prague,” a mission statement for its sweaty, ecstatic worldbuilding.

The January project recently earned a 2026 Grammy nomination for Best Dance/Electronic Album — her first nomination in six years.

The opener, “Love Crimes,” catfishes the ears with the daunting, yet ethereal first 15 seconds, before the floor detonates into a rave-ready beat. Lyrically, the track oscillates between regret and indifference. On one hand, “For each angel fallen, my heart is broken [...] the best times are the hardest to let go,” on the other, “You so sexual, that body flexible [...] gotta let you know, I gotta let you go.” The latter comes off as shallow, as if it were expected that their love was only a temporary affair, but the former reads entirely regretful.

“Slushy” follows like a memory from the same night, shimmering with video game textures and spoken recollections of a reckless Friday. Its closing whisper, “Welcome to the second phase,” moves the listener from the rave into the afterglow.

“Wild and Alone (feat. PinkPantheress)” softens the edges, tracing the distance between fame and intimacy. FKA Twigs longs for connection while acknowledging the impossibility of it, singing like someone trying to keep a flame alive in a windstorm. It is restrained, lingering and beautifully lonely.

On “HARD,” she finally cracks open the album’s more playful shell. The track launches with Björk-coded woodwind chaos before snapping into a bubblegum chorus that sounds like pop music duct-taped to a hummingbird. It is silly, sensual and rule-bending — everything FKA Twigs does best.

The lead single, “Cheap Hotel,” is where the narrative of the story she is telling finally comes into focus. After asking “Would you do it hard?” on the previous track, she ends up at a dingy motel with friends, inviting a guy to bring his credit card and step into her world. Admittedly, the song could have benefited mainly from keeping its focus on listenability. The slowed chorus breaks the song’s momentum, and the repetitive lyrics do not need to be so clearly heard.

“Touch A Girl” strips the fantasy down to pure discomfort. “I just don’t think you know how to really touch a girl,” she sings. The track works better as connective tissue than as a standalone moment, but the layered, gelatinous, beautifully textural production keeps the track afloat.

The second single, “Predictable Girl,” is the emotional thesis of the album: FKA Twigs’ reckoning with her own patterns, watching herself fall into the same soft traps. The music video’s dual-self choreography echoes this, capturing the tug-of-war between instinct and introspection.

In “Sushi,” desire wins the battle. FKA Twigs leans fully into hedonism, singing about playing lovers for a week with someone new. The “walk for me, serve” sample is camp perfection, sealing the track with a grin and a hair flip. It is the album’s brightest burst of serotonin.

“Piece of Me” shifts into ‘90s R&B glow, combining slick electronic touches with sensuality that feels lived-in rather than chased. However, “Lost All My Friends” throws a wrench into the narrative. “When I was on earth, I was spinning,” she sings, suddenly framing the entire album as something otherworldly, or at least emotionally dissociated.

By the time listeners reach “Stereo Boy,” they are back in the familiar territory of loving someone unavailable, unreachable and too wired on nightlife ever to slow down. It mirrors the themes of “Wild and Alone,” suggesting that despite her self-awareness, FKA Twigs is still prone to orbiting the same emotional sunburns.

“EUSEXUA Afterglow” is not a sequel, rather a relapse, a haze and a diary written in eyeliner after the night has already chewed people up a little. FKA Twigs sifts through desire, disappointment, longing and self-sabotage with that signature blend of theatrical vulnerability and club-ready pulse.

The record does not aim for clarity. It revels in the contradictions of being human, horny, heartbroken and hungry. If “EUSEXUA” was the rush, “EUSEXUA Afterglow” is the truth that follows: messy, tender and impossible to look away from.

Thomas’ rating: 4.5/5

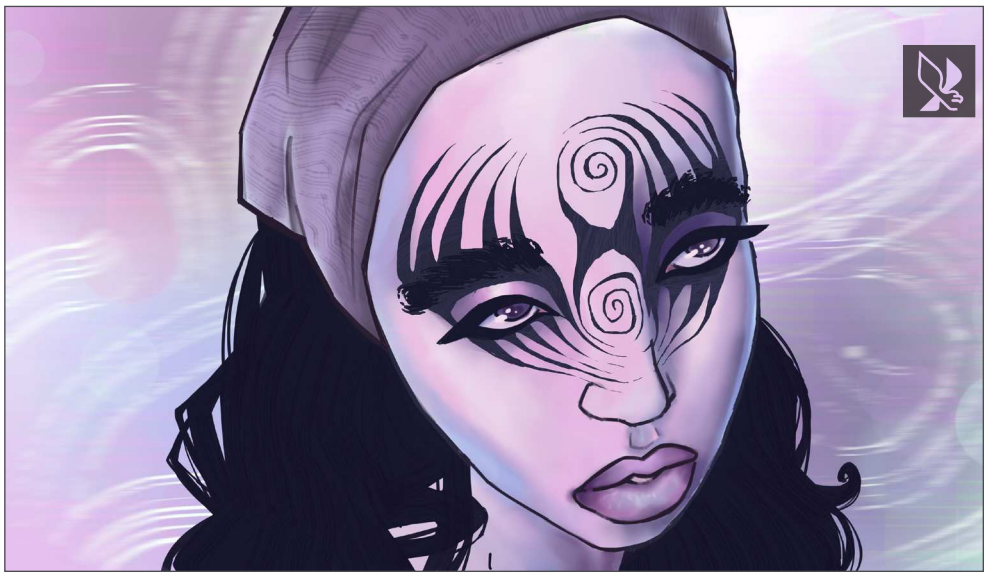


Illustration by Kaitlyn Kampschneider

Women's soccer head coach John Hedlund 'sets standard' of winning at North Texas

HEDLUND continued from page 1

Hedlund carried his prep career into his collegiate one, becoming a four-year letterwinner at Midwestern State University by the end of 1984. He earned NAIA All-America Team honors twice and broke the NAIA record for scoring four goals in one game at the national tournament during his time as a Mustang, achievements that landed him in Midwestern State's Athletic Hall of Honor.

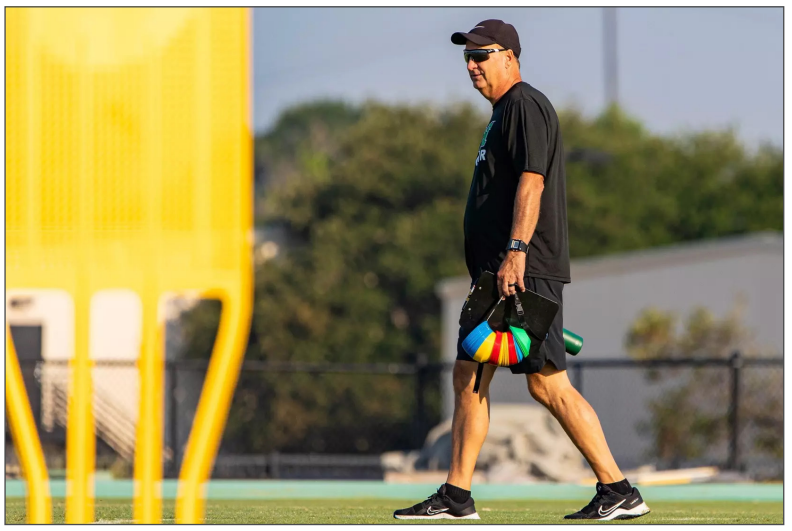
Waldrum, a Mustang who strung together a Hall of Honor resume of his own from 1975-1978, came back to Midwestern State to finish his degree at the same time Hedlund played in Wichita Falls, Texas. Waldrum stayed close to the program, even though his eligibility was up, which led to the future head coaches crossing paths.

"He had the technical skills, obviously, to be a big contributor, but he really had a good mental toughness about him," Waldrum said. "[It was] a competitiveness in him that propelled him in his playing career and, quite frankly, probably is what carried over and has made him so successful as a coach there at North Texas."

Waldrum recognized Hedlund's hunger for winning early on, an eagerness that also caught the attention of professional soccer organizations. In the span of 12 years following his time in a Mustang jersey, he played for the United States Men's Olympic qualifying team, the New York Express and Dallas Sidekicks in the Major Indoor Soccer League and the Dallas Rockets in the United Soccer League.

He finished his time professionally with the Sidekicks, a team chock-full of players, most of whom are still coaches in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. He did not know it at the time, but his teammates soon proved invaluable to building a program from the ground up.

"When I got into coaching, I started to use those contacts to get players up here," Hedlund said. "Some of my best players came off of their club teams and things like that. [...] It really helped me build a program up here at UNT."



Credit **Mean Green Sports**

Hedlund poses with his team after winning the 2019 Conference USA Women's Soccer Championship. Credit **Mean Green Sports**

As Hedlund's pro career neared its end due to age, he began to think about what his life would look like after playing. His initial plan was to pursue a path in criminal justice, as he majored in it at Midwestern State and worked as an investigator for a brief period.

In doing so, however, "a part of him was missing," sounding an alarm within him to find another calling.

It was his mother-in-law who nudged him toward coaching, continually suggesting that Hedlund should work in the sport he loved dearly. The push turned into action, leading him to make a phone call to a place that, at the time, was in uncharted waters.

How a call turned into a calling

Despising North Texas was common practice for Hedlund and his teammates at Midwestern State.

Back when the Mean Green athletic department had a men's soccer program, the team was one of the Mustangs' biggest rivals, making every game between the two an intense, physical bout. In one of their meetings, a North Texas player pushed Hedlund further up the pitch and broke his kneecap. When Hedlund looks back on that game, he does not fixate on the fracture but rather the ferocity of the rivalry, which he says made for some of his best games ever.

When it came time to search for open coaching spots, Hedlund never saw himself coaching at the high school level, so he looked for collegiate jobs.

He chose to call Richard Lowe, the North Texas men's soccer head coach at the time, who once spearheaded the charge against Hedlund's former college team. Their relationship dated back further than Hedlund's days as a Mustang, as he had previously been recruited by Lowe to play for North Texas in high school.

"I didn't know how Coach Lowe was going to relate to my call, I really didn't," Hedlund said.

With one swift conversation on the phone and a conversation in Lowe's office, Hedlund got to work helping the squad he once disliked excel as an assistant coach. From 1991-1994, he learned the ins and outs of running a program, from recruiting to budget management.

His newfound knowledge became vital very quickly. In the last year of the men's program, Hedlund's fellow assistant coach stepped down, promoting him to the second-in-command beside Lowe. The head coach retired from the role soon thereafter, leaving Hedlund to take the reins of the team.

Hedlund was forced to saddle up quickly — hitting the ground running — recruiting and building a game-ready roster over several months. Right before his first season at the helm, the new world he created for himself came crashing down. To comply with Title IX and address budget concerns, the university elected to cut the program, along with men's tennis, that summer in 1995.

The decision sent Hedlund into shock, realizing the team he put together for the fall would never see the field. He walked grudgingly to meet with his players and deliver the news, sitting amongst them as tears stained their locker room floor.

"It was heartbreaking," Hedlund said. "[...] I had to tell them, but I felt like I needed to tell them."

North Texas' athletic director Craig Helwig bore the bad news about the disbanding of the men's team, but a month later, he delivered what would be the dawn of North Texas' most decorated tenure.

"He said, 'What do you think about coaching women's soccer?' and I said, 'I've never coached women's soccer,'" Hedlund said. "'Well, what do you think about it?' he goes, and I said to him, 'Well, I need a job, so let's try this.'"

Starting from scratch

Hedlund did not venture very far to get the women's soccer program off the ground for the 1995 season.

To build a nucleus of productive players, Hedlund began attending the practices and games of the university's club women's soccer team, handpicking a group to add to his roster. From there, he added transfers and players out of Texas high schools to round out his inaugural team.

More than anything, Hedlund sacrificed time constructing a foundation for the program. He expended an immense amount of time recruiting, attending Mean Green sporting events to learn from the coaches' interactions and meticulously breaking down the sport. Guerrieri, who started the Texas A&M women's soccer program in 1993, said that innovation and persistence are vital to building something special.

"At that age, you want things to happen immediately, and you've got to do what you've got to do to make it work and keep it moving forward," Guerrieri said. "However, you've also got to understand that if it's not going to be done for you, then you've got to be prepared to go out, roll up your sleeves and get it done yourself. That's been one of the things that has always been one of the hallmarks of our program, and I think it's something that John does a great job with as well."

His new position did not come without growing pains. Although fundamentally the same, transitioning from coaching men's to women's soccer required an evolution on his part to bring out the best in his players.

"I always tell people this, but I'm still learning," Hedlund said. "[...] I was pretty high-strung back in the day, and I had to learn that if I'm gonna get the best out of this player, I need to learn her personality. Everybody's different, and I have to do all the right things to get her to play at a high level. You have to be creative in your coaching."

Guerrieri says starting a successful program from scratch takes patience, but for Hedlund, patience was never an option. He wanted to "start out on a winning note" in his first year — a tall task for any infant program.

Head coach John Hedlund celebrates with his players after winning the 2001 Sun Belt regular-season conference championship. This was the first championship for the Mean Green. Credit **Mean Green Sports**

After losing their first match to Texas Tech 3-2, the Mean Green bested Louisiana State 4-2, a victory that served not only as a catalyst for the team's first winning season but also for those to come.

"The biggest thing is that we got off to the right start because that helped me and gave me confidence that I could do this," Hedlund said. "I didn't want to have a losing record right from the beginning, and then here comes number two, number three. [...] If it went the other way, I don't know if I would have lasted this long."

North Texas went on to beat the Mississippi State Bulldogs a week after toppling the Tigers. The team won 15 matches in its first five years against opponents from prominent conferences, including two top-25 opponents, one of which was ranked in the top 10.

"The thing that was most important to me was that we were competing for championships every single year," said Michelle Lenard, current Baylor University women's soccer head coach and North Texas player from 1999-2002. "I loved that about him. I loved his driving ambition, his competitiveness and his ability to put the team in the best position possible to be successful."

The Mean Green jumped ship to the Sun Belt Conference in 2000 after spending four seasons in the Big West Conference. In their second year competing in the SBC, a statement win over the powerhouse University of Denver program was a crucial part of securing the 2001 regular-season conference championship and North Texas' first title.

As Hedlund reflects on his run with the Mean Green, one of the first images that comes to mind is him smiling alongside his 2001 team, holding up the number one with their fingers and draping their arms around one another.

For him, it was the defining moment for his career and program. North Texas had finally arrived.

"It was important for me to win my first championship and get the players their first ring," Hedlund said. "We all needed to taste it, and then once we did, we just kind of took off and started getting all the way up to 16 titles, but we had to get that first one."

A winning tradition

Although Hedlund had a huge hand in steering North Texas in the right direction, it was ultimately how the players executed his game plan that led to success. The head coach knew it, too, which is why he took pride in his knack for finding diamonds in the rough.

"A lot of coaches will say, I recruited a lot of kids that maybe a lot of coaches didn't see anything in them, but I did when I was on the recruiting trail, and I brought them in to give them the opportunity to build something special here," Hedlund said. "That was the kind of talent that I feel like I had. Maybe the proudest thing I feel pretty good about throughout my career is I gave a kid an opportunity to come play here where a lot of schools passed up on them."

His aptitude for finding potential stuck out to other coaches in the field as well.

"John's a really good judge of talent, and he knows what he wants," Guerrieri said. "He's always been very good about keeping his eye on the ball, not getting distracted by different situations around him. He was able to stay with his nose going forward on the types of [players] he wanted, the types of people he wanted to come in as assistant coaches, how he was going to empower those coaches and make them the best that they could be."

Editor's note: This article was originally published online and has been shortened for print. Read more at ntdaily.com.

North Texas volleyball freshman trio embodies team culture, becomes early contributors to winning team

By Ruben Plascencia
Staff Writer

With sparse returners in the offseason, newcomers have expectedly played a significant role in North Texas' 11-win improvement from last season to head coach Dave Fleming.

However, Fleming did not anticipate a freshman trio of libero Dakota Mitchell, defensive specialist Alessandra Romo and setter Sidney Soria contributing as much as they have so far. He said their impact has been at a level that is rare to see at the Division I level as someone who began his coaching career in 1990.

"I could see that if we were [8-21] and we were playing a lot of the freshmen for the future," Fleming said. "But the fact that we're [21-8], I don't know how our freshmen did it. I'm just kind of blown away with what they've been able to do on the court."

Mitchell, Romo and Soria have played in every set for North Texas this season, making it and Indiana University the only two DI programs to have three freshmen do so.

Mitchell leads the Mean Green with 382 digs, while Romo and Soria are fourth and fifth in that category. The trio is also within the top five in assists and service aces for North Texas.

The contributions have translated into a strong season for North Texas volleyball as the team heads into the American Conference Volleyball Championship as the No. 4 seed with a 21-8 overall record.

Freshman libero Dakota Mitchell high-fives freshman defensive specialist Alessandra Romo against Abilene Christian University at the UNT Volleyball Center on Oct. 29, 2025.
Photo by Sarah Stokes

"I didn't think we would be as successful as we are today," Romo said. "If you would have told me that we would be [21-8] on the season in the summer, I would not have believed you. This has been a great ride, honestly."

Of the three newcomers, Mitchell had the longest road from Kalona, Iowa, to Denton. There were nerves about being 12 hours from home and not seeing family as often, but Mitchell said they were short-lived once she met her team.

"I know they're in the same position that I'm in," Mitchell said. "It definitely has helped because we really lean on each other a lot when it comes to those types of things, just because we're new to this whole thing as well."

An Amarillo, Texas native and former All-State athlete, Soria's talents have transferred over to college volleyball. She is second with 542 assists behind senior setter Alexa Washington, who says the freshmen have helped her growth throughout her fourth season at North Texas.

"They joke and call us 'unc' and all this stuff," Washington said. "But I think it just made me mature as a person because I feel like I'm kind of the mom of the team. [...] It's just exciting getting to see them grow."

Romo's journey was complicated as schools recruited her for different positions. She played outside hitter, defensive specialist and setter at various times throughout her youth.

However, her biggest lesson came from learning to open up after missing her sophomore season at McKinney Boyd High School due to an injury. Unable to make an impact physically, she learned to create energy from the sideline.

"It also taught me just to be a cheerleader for everyone," Romo said. "I think that was the biggest thing, because I was a pretty selfish player back before that injury, and I learned to like, cheer for my teammates, be proud of them and be happy for them."

All season, North Texas has prioritized unity among its 16 players and coaching staff. None epitomize the culture better than its three freshmen.

As suitemates, they spend most of their time on and off the court in each other's company.

"It has been awesome," Romo said. "Becoming best friends with the freshmen from being suitemates and roommates, and then being on the court together all the time just made our bonds so much stronger."

Living together, sharing the freshman experience and even playing similar volleyball positions has furthered Mitchell, Romo and Soria's drive to compete as players.

"We live together, we eat together, we basically do everything together, so they're like my sisters," Soria said. "To come in and do it with them and to make each other better every day, it's just so great to be a part of the experience of a successful team."

A preseason retreat to Granbury, Texas, planted the seed for the trio and team's connection. In one activity, players wore white shirts and painted their hands to place them on the person "who gives the best hugs" or best fits another category.

In another, the team had a baking war and started learning how everyone could react in competitive or high-pressure situations that they could face on the court. Mitchell says the two-and-a-half-day retreat unlocked a "deeper level" of confidence between everyone on the team.

"You build a trust outside of volleyball, and so I feel like it just naturally goes into volleyball itself," Mitchell said. "There's just this natural trust there, I guess, that we already have with each other that makes it so much easier to play with them."

After a season of important wins, the trio's more lasting memories are in anecdotes, from eating beignets in New Orleans' French Quarter to riding the bus back home from Wichita, Kansas, with a six-game win streak.

Still, the focus remains on continuing to improve with a shot at an American Conference title on the line from Nov. 21-23.

"We all are excited," Soria said. "We come to the gym with passion every day, just trying to get better, even in these last couple of weeks. It's just great to be doing it alongside people that you love and that we've worked hard with. You've done the hard things, you've done the fun things all together."

At a Glance:

Volleyball

The Mean Green volleyball (21-8, 11-5 American) team will take on No. 5 seed Wichita State (18-10, 10-6 American) in the first round of the American Conference Championship as the No. 4 seed. North Texas previously played the Shockers on Oct. 26 in Wichita, Kansas, and won 3-2. The rematch will continue the matchup that has reached a fifth set in the previous three encounters.

Football

North Texas football (9-1, 5-1 American) heads on the road to in-state opponent Rice (5-5, 2-4 American) on Nov. 22 to play one of its two final games in a tight race for the Dec. 5 American Conference Championship. The Owls last played on Nov. 8, where they defeated the University of Alabama at Birmingham (3-7, 1-5 American) 24-17, and are coming off a bye week heading into the encounter. The Mean Green similarly last played against the Blazers and defeated them 53-24 on Nov. 15.

Men's Basketball

Mean Green men's basketball (3-2) returns to The Super Pit on Nov. 20 to play Central Arkansas after losing its previous two games on a three-game road trip. North Texas has been undefeated at home to start the season.

Review of the North Texas football postseason picture

By Justin Na
Sports Editor

At 9-1 overall and 5-1 in the American Conference, North Texas has already experienced a historic season, reaching nine wins for the first time since 2018. The season has led the Mean Green to sit second in the conference, with a Dec. 5 American Championship appearance within reach.

With two games left in the Mean Green's schedule and its place in the standings, the team has become the favorite to win the championship. To control its chances to appear in the championship, North Texas will need to win its final two games against Rice and Temple, respectively.

If the Mean Green drops a single game, there is still a chance, but only if multiple other teams similarly fall to two losses.

While North Texas' chances of making the championship seem likely, its possible opponents in the championship vary between three opponents, each with a unique path.

Navy (8-2, 6-1 American):

The Midshipmen have been atop the American standings for most of the season, arriving at a 5-0 conference record on Oct. 25. North Texas became Navy's first speed bump, handing the Midshipmen their first loss of the season in a 31-17 Mean Green victory on Nov. 1. Since the loss, Navy was blown out 49-10 to No. 9 Notre Dame (8-2) but also upset the University of South Florida (7-3, 4-2 American) 41-38 on Nov. 15 to knock the Bulls further out of the conference race.

With only a single conference loss heading into their season finale against the University of Memphis (8-3, 4-3 American) on Nov. 27, the Midshipmen can defeat the Tigers, have one conference loss this season and qualify for the championship. Memphis, who is the sole opponent in Navy's way, lost its last two conference games after initially starting the year undefeated at 6-0.

As a service academy, Navy has run an option offense that boasts the No. 1 rushing attack in the nation, averaging 308 rushing yards per game.

No. 24 Tulane (8-2, 5-1 American):

This season, Tulane's (8-2, 5-1 American) sole loss came on Oct. 30 at the University of Texas at San Antonio (5-5, 3-3 American) in a 48-26 blowout. Since the loss, the Green Wave rebounded with wins over a previously ranked Memphis team and Florida Atlantic University (4-6, 3-4 American).

In the Nov. 18 College Football Poll, Tulane was ranked No. 24, the only American team in the rankings. The placement might serve as the tiebreaker for the Green Wave to host the American Championship if they win both of their last two games and tie another team for the No. 1 seed.

Now the only two remaining teams in Tulane's way are Temple (5-5, 3-3 American), who sit at a .500 record, and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (1-9, 0-7 American), who has yet to win a conference game.

Tulane has found its success with a balanced approach on both sides of the ball. Offensively, the team ranks No. 65 in points per game at 28, and No. 80 in defense ranking in average points allowed per game at 26.

Reaching the championship would be an opportunity for Tulane to win its first American Championship since the 2022 season, when it beat UCF 45-28.

Photo by Ismael Beltran

East Carolina (7-3, 5-1 American):

The Pirates (7-3, 5-1 American) opened their season in a rockier 3-3 start compared to their other top American counterparts. After the start, East Carolina rattled off four straight wins to join the now three-way tie for the No. 2 seed alongside Tulane and North Texas. A part of the reason was that two of East Carolina's losses came in its nonconference schedule, separate from the conference standings, with its only conference loss coming against Tulane on Oct. 9.

During the team's four-game win streak, the Pirates averaged 41.2 points per game, cracked the 300-yard passing mark twice and hit 100 yards rushing twice, showing their explosive offense.

Their remaining two conference opponents will both be on the road against UTSA on Nov. 22 and FAU on Nov. 29. East Carolina's visit to San Antonio will be an attempt to break the Roadrunners' 22-game streak of conference home victories, started in 2023. The team will also hope to defeat the Owls, who rank No. 1 in passing yards per game at 328.9, but have struggled to string together wins in an up-and-down season.

College Football Playoff:

If North Texas defeats any of its three most likely American opponents in the conference championship, the Mean Green are likely to appear in the College Football Playoffs as the No. 12 seed, playing the eventual No. 5 seed.

This week's CFP Poll had Texas Tech (10-1, 7-1 Big 12) slotted in at the No. 5 seed, meaning head coach Eric Morris could play his former alma mater against the Red Raiders. Morris has played Texas Tech once before, as the head coach of North Texas, on Sept. 14, 2024, when the Mean Green lost 66-21.

If the Mean Green make the College Football Playoffs and replace Tulane in the Nov. 18 projections, North Texas would be one of three Texas teams in the playoffs, including Texas A&M and Texas Tech.

President Trump's tariffs are overwhelming consumers and the economy

By Robert Trevino
Staff Writer

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments over the legality of President Donald Trump's tariff regime on Nov. 5. A dozen states and small businesses brought the case forward with the same goal: to get rid of the tariffs.

If Trump's goal is to lower Americans' cost of living, he needs to cut tariffs and commit to more sensible trade policies.

According to the Tax Foundation, tariffs, also referred to as customs duties, are taxes imposed by a government on imported or exported goods. The goal of these taxes is to protect domestic industries from foreign competition, influence trade policies and generate revenue from imports.

Costs imposed by these tariffs are charged to the business importing the goods. However, like with Reaganomics – the economic policy by former President Ronald Reagan that focused on wealthy businesses having trickle-down benefits to lower classes in the form of economic growth – the costs trickled down to the consumer.

This additional cost to goods causes price spikes and an increase in the cost of living, while also punishing small businesses that lack the upfront capital to keep up with fluctuating tariff prices.

According to NBC News, exit polls from the most recent election identified the economy as their biggest issue. Most of the people who responded to these surveys also noted that tariffs are playing a significant role in the economy's instability.

There has been an overall 4.9 percent rise in retail prices due to the tariffs, according to Pricing Lab, and if they are upheld, that figure is expected to rise further. This would incentivise consumers to shop with U.S.-based companies, though domestic companies are likely to raise prices to stay competitive with tariffed products.

Rising prices of building materials like steel, aluminum and lumber will drive up housing prices and increase the start-up costs of the manufacturing facilities Trump plans to bring back to the U.S.

Trump's tariff policies have also affected farmers by cutting them off from foreign markets due to retaliatory tariffs. China has refused to purchase soybeans from the U.S., which is an export worth roughly $25 billion. Fertilizers were also heavily tariffed for seven months until Trump updated his executive order on Nov. 15.

The issue being argued before the Supreme Court, though, is not the tariffs but rather the legality of their imposition. Trump used a 1977 law, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, which allows the president to exercise a wide range of economic powers in emergencies.

However, the IEEPA does not mention tariffs. Although Trump does have the authority to "investigate, regulate, or prohibit" a wide variety of goods or currencies, his use of the law is specious.

The law states its use must be used in conjunction with a national emergency to combat "any unusual and extraordinary threat." The law also states, "any exercise of such authorities to deal with any new threat shall be based on a new declaration of national emergency."

Trump initially used the law to combat fentanyl crossing illegally into the country, which was announced as a national emergency, but he quickly expanded the use of tariffs on more than 90 countries. His justification for this was the threats posed by "the large and persistent trade deficit."

A trade deficit occurs when a country imports more goods than it exports. This can be harmful, leading to the loss of manufacturing jobs and an increase in the national debt, but it can also be a sign of a strong economy.

The U.S., when compared on the world stage, has a healthy economy. Exports grossed $1.9 trillion in 2023, with the nation's leading exports being petroleum, cars and gas turbines. That same year, the U.S. was also globally ranked first in terms of gross domestic product, second in total exports and ninth in terms of GDP per capita.

This trade deficit crisis does not meet the bar to be classified as a national emergency, defined by Congress as a "sudden unforeseen set of circumstances posing a danger to the nation."

This classification is necessary to utilize the IEEPA. However, Trump went ahead and implemented the IEEPA instead of Section 232 of the 1962 Trade Expansion Act, which past presidents have used to impose tariffs.

The section differs from the IEEPA because the law requires an investigation and report to be issued within 270 days of its invocation, and it focuses on goods that threaten to impair national security.

Tariff supporters believe these taxes will help reshore manufacturing jobs that have been lost overseas. Trump has also said in defense of the tariffs that without the ability to implement them quickly, the country would be "defenseless."

One of Trump's biggest campaign goals was to lower costs, but the tariffs are preventing that from happening. On Nov. 14, Trump cut his tariffs on beef, coffee and other agricultural products. Both beef and coffee have seen significant price increases since the tariffs were imposed.

The reason the administration cited was their ability to strike trade deals, therefore no longer needing the tariffs, but the exemptions allowed will apply to all reciprocal tariffs. According to The New York Times, financial analysts believe the move was to lower grocery costs for Americans and an admission that the tariffs are raising costs.

Americans should contact their representatives and let them know they are allowing prices to increase by not taking back tariff powers. People should also continue to support small and local businesses that are not able to compete with corporations that either get exempt from the tariffs or are able to pay them easily.

The country needs a smarter strategy for world trade. The Trump administration's current tariff policy is overwhelming consumers and the economy. If there is no change to the current tariff policy, costs of goods will continue to increase, hurting the economy in the long run.

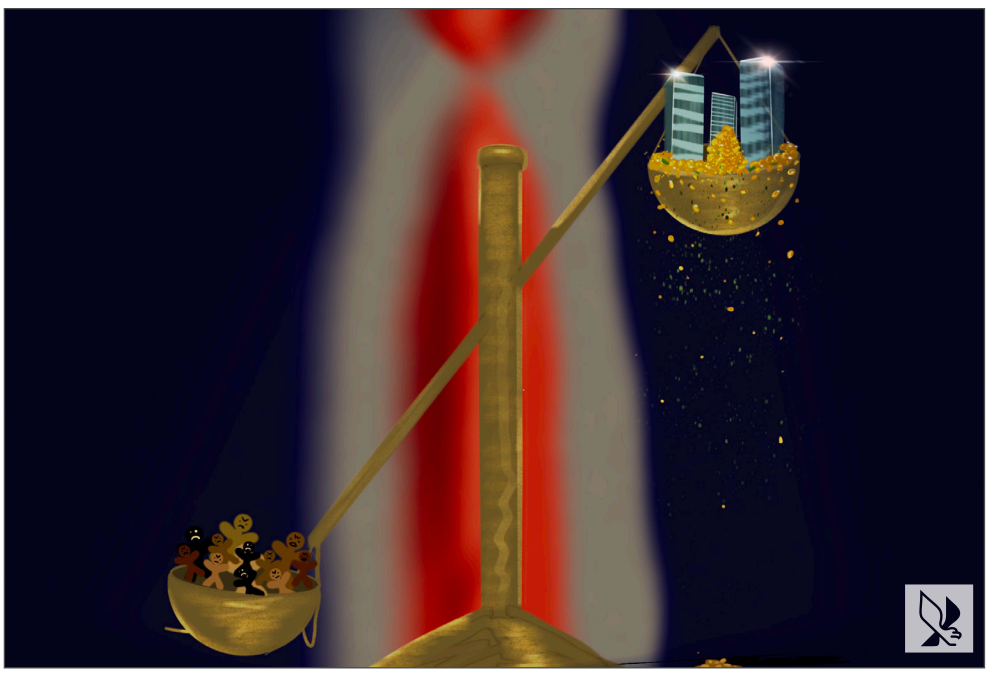


Illustration by Victoria Maldonado

Lack of adequate K-12 literacy rates exposes failure of modern American school systems

By Ernesto Valdez Coronado
Staff Writer

The United States' literacy problem is a slow-moving civic emergency where too many students are advancing through school without mastering the reading skills that anchor every subject, paycheck and ballot. That failure weakens the social mobility of individuals by allowing high school graduates who are unable to utilize reading comprehension to enter the workforce.

However, it is fixable if states, districts and teachers start intervening and prioritizing reading curriculum. Literacy anchors every subject in education. If an individual has high levels of illiteracy, the likelihood of living in poverty or being incarcerated increases, according to American Progress.

U.S. K-12 reading scores are falling short in schools nationwide, and the U.S. also falls behind internationally, with European schools in countries like Belgium and Switzerland scoring significantly higher. European teenagers graduate at a rate 10 percent higher than American students, thanks to higher program funding and an emphasis on mentoring rather than lecturing.

According to the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress report, a third of eighth-graders read below the basic level, and students are unable to discern key concepts or sequence events in short texts. American high school seniors' test results from the same NAEP report show that a third of students tested lack basic reading skills.

Yielding similar results, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation, a worldwide adult skills survey, shows U.S. 16 to 24-year-olds are below the OECD average in reading, numeracy and problem solving.

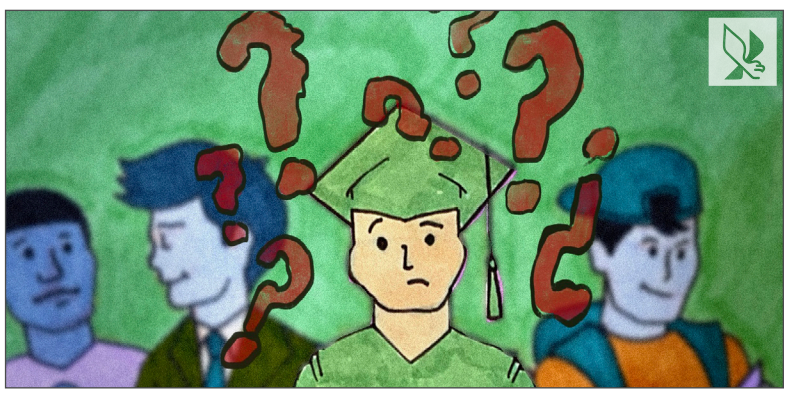


Illustration by Arturo Martinez and Victoria Maldonado

The U.S.'s modern education system is failing, as evidenced by these literacy results. Early gaps in an individual's education often become adult disadvantages that affect college readiness and job training.

According to the Chamber of Commerce, the current method schools use seems to result in more students graduating but being ill-prepared. Eighty-four percent of hiring managers say high school graduates are not prepared for the workforce. Students are graduating, but unlike in previous decades, the degree milestone is no longer a guarantee that they can effectively comprehend what they are reading– a necessity for future college applications or careers.

Graduation rates for districts are required to achieve a good image and accountability ranking, which varies from state to state. These ratings affect public perception and funding, which means there is an added incentive for attendance-based graduation despite a lack of demonstrated literacy achievement.

Some states illustrate that improved reading policy and practice can change the curve. Teacher training, early literacy screenings, tutoring and a retention-with-support policy were all factors that improved fourth-grade reading in Mississippi after 2013.

Similarly, Texas has a state literacy plan in place, introduced at the very beginning of this year, to combat declining literacy rates from early childhood to high school graduation. The plan highlights providing teacher training across the state to help educators identify students with reading gaps.

However, not every student literacy rate increase in Mississippi or Texas came from just one miracle of legislation. Instead, the state incorporated solutions that consistently emphasized reading.

Schools and administrators should adopt a holistic approach rather than relying on a single policy or lesson plan to improve literacy rates.

Every state should provide concise, grade-by-grade reading goals for families and teachers. NAEP is just one factor contributing to decreased adolescent literacy rates, but its trends should spur urgency among educators and administrators.

Although most states provide some level of reading development, few offer in-class, connected coaching or compulsory time-on-task. Mississippi's 2013 Literacy-Based Promotion Act, a state initiative, is a good example that provided classroom coaching and reading development that achieved the largest reading improvements nationwide.

In addition, a national assessment needs to require strict teacher-prep prerequisites, reading science licensure exams, district curriculum recommendations and multilingual learner support. Students should receive daily, structured reading periods and nuanced text writing for older grades throughout classrooms.

Universal K-12 testing that identifies reading shortfalls yearly, even through high school, followed by remedial tutoring before a reading gap can develop into a reading deficiency, is critical. For example, many districts that implemented this preventive measure through summer learning experiences, such as Los Angeles Unified Recovery, saw localized improvements in statistics despite national losses.

States should provide options for extended-year graduation for those schools that do not want to risk lower standards but acknowledge that some students need more time to learn.

Florida's 12th grade reading retake exam, an extended-year graduation diploma option, allows students to meet literacy standards a semester or two longer without being held back from graduating.

Literacy begets information. If a student cannot adequately read, they most likely are not succeeding in math, science or social studies. No student should have to graduate without meeting literacy standards.

An educational system that grants a high school diploma to one-third of students who read below grade level is wrong. This is not an issue of students and teachers trying their hardest and failing despite the odds. It is a system that works to hand everyone success, not comprehension.